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Gemini 15 Memories

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Gemini 15

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Memories shared by Karen Mahaffey

Hometown: West St Paul, Minnesota

Why I chose WKU: Close to my home Sonora, KY & good music program

My major: Sociology major, Music minor

My class: 1971

Gemini Bands: 1968 Gemini 15

Instruments: trumpet

Tours: The 1968 European USO tour to Germany

Friends: Best friend Brenda Fatoney, we were the youngest in the group at age 18 when we toured Europe.

Larnelle Harris was an amazing friend also, and John Carpenter was so funny. They went on to become very famous, Larnelle as a world known gospel singer & John as a Hollywood movie director! All the members of this Gemini 15 were very close as we spent those 2-3 months touring USO locations and riding the tour bus

and sometimes staying in barracks and meeting the young GIs who were stationed there. Dr Carpenter was like the father figure who looked out for us, and was our MC at the shows, and Dr Livingston directed the band and thrilled the audience with his amazing jazz clarinet skills!

Memories: Such a great experience getting to see & experience Germany and shop there as tourists and see the beautiful country and hang out after the shows with the servicemen. Interesting to see how their daily lives were spent, and we even got to sleep in the barracks & wear Army clothes and combat boots one day! We entertained the troops with our big band music and Benny Goodman style numbers. The gals also did a couple of dance numbers with costume changes, one an Uncle Sam bit complete with red white & blue outfits of satin shorts, coats with tails, fishnet hose & top hats! Another featured the gals dancing in gold mini dresses with gold sparkly tights and gold shoes! Another thrill was Larnelle Harris on drums and John Carpenter on guitar playing songs like "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" while we did costume changes. Our trombone player Carla Bratcher with a lovely voice sang a couple solos from Broadway movies! Rosemary amazed the troops with her mad marimba skills! All the gals in our band were so talented- and so much fun! It was a thrill to be a part of the USO!

At the end of the USO tour 3 of us girls & 2 of the GIs we met & got to know were able to spend 10 days traveling & camping out in their VW bus and seeing the countryside of Germany, Switzerland and even made it to Italy to tour the Vatican! So many memories and experiences of a lifetime!

Benefits: Probably my best benefit aside from the wordly experience of traveling outside the US was that I met my future husband at one of the USO after gatherings. He was a GI stationed in Karlsruhe and he & a buddy followed us around to several nearby shows. We fell in love and eventually married in November 1970 when he got out of the service. Even though we divorced after 13 years and 2 children, we pretty much had a storybook romance that we told over & over. (He's one of the guys we traveled with in that VW bus at the end of our tour!)